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ACCURATE REPORT

OF THE

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S P E E C H

OF THE

RIGHT HON. JOHN FOSTER,

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SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,

IN THE COMMITTEE ON THE

ROMAN CATHOLIC BILL.

FEB. 27, 1793.

DUBLIN:

PRINTED BY W. CORBET, NO. 57, GREAT-BRITAIN-STREET, OPPOSITE
GRANBY-ROW.

M, DCC, XCIII.

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OF THE

S. P. E. C. I. M.

OF THE

RIGHT HON. JOHN FOSTER

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT



PRINTED BY THE

ROYAL CANAL BOAT BUILDERS

1853

DUBLIN

PRINTED BY W. J. MURPHY, 10, ST. MARK'S STREET, DUBLIN

W. J. MURPHY

PRINTED

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Editor of the following pages feels it incumbent on him to acknowledge, notwithstanding his best exertions, that he has not been able to render ample justice to the Right Hon. Gentleman, whose sentiments, however, he hopes he has preserved with tolerable accuracy:—He speaks not from an affectation of delicacy, for the elegance and energy which strongly marked every link of this excellent chain of argument, could scarcely be delineated by any pencil. The orator in no instance forgets his own dignity, or betrays a sentiment unworthy a benevolent heart. The temper of a gentleman, and the talents of a profound statesman, are diffused through every line. The most important subject ever agitated in our Senate, is here discussed

discussed with a candour at which NONE can take offence, and a sincerity that ALL must applaud. Those of opposite sentiments, but enlightened minds, who at a future day may peruse those pages, will not the less admire such genius, because it corresponds not with their own opinions :—But Protestants, of principles consistent with protestantism, must regard with more pious veneration, the memory of him, who at so momentous a crisis, stood forward in defence of that edifice on which, he conceived, the civil and religious liberties of unborn races of men ultimately depended.

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ACCURATE REPORT
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RIGHT HON. JOHN FOSTER,
SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

WHEN a Bill is introduced into this House for changing the Constitution under which we have lived in happiness and prosperity, and under which we have seen this kingdom gradually rise to a state of affluence, and to an extent of Trade and Manufacture, of Freedom and Independence, beyond the most sanguine expectation of its warmest advocates; when this change has been suggested to this kingdom from abroad, without any internal cause requiring its introduction, at a time of the most perfect content and unanimity, religious animosi-

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ties at rest, and every man contributing his industry and exertions to the public weal—— little as he was in the habit of speaking, he could not forbear to request the indulgence of the House while he should deliver his sentiments on so great a subject. However, before he entered into it, he would notice some of the transactions of the last summer; this he wished to have avoided, but the manner in which the conduct of Grand Juries had been mentioned, by two or three gentlemen in that house, made it absolutely necessary for him, and he would say their conduct had not only been proper but necessary and perfectly constitutional.

Soon after the rising of Parliament, last year, and after this House had almost unanimously rejected the petition of the Catholics, for granting a Qualified Franchise, a letter signed Edward Byrne, had been circulated with a very suspicious secrecy, but was however publicly known before the summer assizes. This letter was full of sedition, he thought so from the moment he first saw it, and he thought so still. It told the Catholics they were Slaves—There can be no Slaves, if there be no Tyrants. To whom did it mean that they were *slaves*? To the protestants, who were then pointed out to them

them as tyrants and oppressors : An insinuation so notoriously false, that but for the remainder of the letter it might have passed unnoticed. It next endeavoured to poison the Catholic mind against the Protestant, by asserting that Roman Catholic Tenants were turned out of their lands to beggary to make room for Protestant Freeholders.—He now spoke in the hearing of the greatest part of the landed property in the kingdom, and he appealed to their knowledge whether such assertion was founded in fact, in any part of Ireland.—It was not ; and he would answer for the county in which he lived, and which he had the honor of representing, that no man in it, made any distinction among his Tenants for Religious Opinions, nor did he ever hear or believe, that any one Catholic was ever turned out of his Farm to make room for a Protestant. The letter with a view to further inflammation, tells them, they are not secure of an impartial Administration of Justice, thereby suggesting, that both Grand and Petty Juries were so bigoted, so forgetful of their oaths, and Magistrates so corrupt, that no impartial justice could be expected from them, and that a change of the Law was *essential to their Protection*. For what purpose was a statement so notoriously

false made to the public, but to mislead and inflame the Papists, to rouse their discontent against the Protestants, and fire their passions to support a Parliament of their own, which it was the great object of the letter to convene, and to convene in a manner the most obnoxious, after the French model and on French principles: A Convention which was to pass by the Parliament, to pass by the Government, and transmit a Petition to the Throne, by Deputies of their own,—as if they would say to his Majesty, you can put no confidence in your Parliament, nor in your Irish Government, they have acted wrong, we only can tell you the wishes of the nation, we are the proper judges of what ought to be the constitution. Some gentlemen had asserted the legality of their convention; he pretended not to much skill in Law or knowledge of the Constitution, but he challenged the boldest Lawyer to meet him on that ground.—He asserted it before them all, to be an illegal Meeting.—It is true he had seen opinions to the contrary, one of them given by a gentleman for whom he had the highest respect, as a lawyer and a man, but the case was not fully stated, nor were the answers fully made to the queries. He would not say that the Catholics
or

or any subjects, had not a right to meet and to form petitions by committees or deputies to his Majesty, or either House of Parliament. He agreed to it in the fullest extent, but this was not the plan of the convention; it was not to be assembled for one particular object, but to be a *permanent* body, to watch over the interests of a class of His Majesty's subjects. In that respect it partook of the nature of Parliament; it took upon itself the duties of Parliament, and could not be justified in a country where Parliament formed part of the Constitution. That it embraced more objects than one is evident, for the attendance of its members was expressly stated not to be required *except on important occasions*.

He would add in defence of the Grand Juries, that by a British Law passed at the Restoration, no petition for a change in the Constitution shall be signed by more than a certain number, unless previously approved by the Majority of the Grand Jury, so that Grand Juries have been there deemed proper bodies to consider of such petitions; and what is the declared Constitution in Great-Britain, cannot be deemed unconstitutional or improper here.—The Grand Juries were then called on constitutionally to notice the letter, and even

as country gentlemen, they had a right, and did feel it their duty to repel its seditious slander, and to support the sense of this House, which Mr. Edward Byrne endeavoured by a counter Convention to overturn. For this conduct they have been represented as impeaching all the Catholics of Ireland.—They animadverted on Mr. Byrne's letter only ; and I believe they all did, I know the Grand Jury of Louth did, distinguish between him and the Catholics at large, whose loyalty and good sense they expressly relied on for disappointing the seditious views of that letter—and here, as no man wished more than he did to avoid personal reflection, and as he had mentioned Mr. Edward Byrne, he felt it a justice to declare that he knew him personally to be a man of worth—that if any of the laws he had ever introduced were serviceable to the trade of this kingdom, he was much indebted for them to the clear and sound information he received from that gentleman—He believed him a most sincere friend to the prosperity of Ireland, but when he acted as a political man, as a minister for others, he must still say he thought him a bad politician, and must totally condemn his conduct.

Having

Having thus vindicated the Grand Juries, he returned to the question before the Committee, which was the clause for granting the Elective Franchise to the Catholics, this they demanded as a *right*, and many gentlemen in the course of debate had talked of it, as a restitution of a right, not a favor. If it were a right, all debate on its policy must be needless, for we could not withhold it. He would therefore consider it in that view, and he trusted he should convince them it could not be claimed as a right.

Persons who call it a right don't distinguish between the real right of the subject and this assumed right. Every subject has a right to be bound only by those laws, and to pay only those taxes which are agreed to by the representative body of the people;—that body is the representative of electors and non-electors equally; but the mode in which that representative body shall be appointed, and who shall share in that appointment, has ever been regulated, ascertained and restrained by law. There is an absurdity in supposing that every individual has a right to elect; if so, it extends equally to all; it was prior to all law, and the whole practice of the British Constitution has been an usurpation.

An act of Henry VI. limited the right of freeholders voting to such as had forty shillings a year. If an *Inherent* right existed, the legislature could not have so modified and narrowed it, but they did so, and the law has been acquiesced in for centuries in both kingdoms.—If it was not a common right then, it certainly cannot become so now. The Registry Act he mentioned also, as an instance whereby freeholders under ten pounds, were excluded from voting, unless they performed certain conditions ; and he dwelt much on the law which totally prevents the exercise of the Franchise, at the time when it is most desirable and can be of most use—at the time when a vacancy takes place, with momentous subjects before Parliament, and when individuals might wish to have a share in the choice. The law won't allow any man at such time to procure a power of voting, for he must be a possessor six months before the vacancy ; it even prevents his voting unless he swears that he did not procure his vote on purpose to qualify him to vote at that election.

Another instance of restraint is in the exclusion of revenue officers in England from voting, men who could not be excluded, if their
right

right was inherent, paramount to parliament, and whom it seems hard to deprive of a franchise, for devoting their time, and their health, to the service of the public. But if the right was inherent, why is the female part of the community excluded, they constitute one half of the people, the unmarried part of them cannot be supposed under influence, and they possess as good sense and understanding as we do. The constitutional ground, on which all these regulations proceed, is that the law restrains all those who ought in reason, to be deemed unfit to vote, either from want of sound discretion, as idiots, and minors, or from being supposed subject to the influence of others, as alms-men, freeholders under forty shillings, and revenue officers, or from not giving those tests of attachment to the constitution, which the laws deem necessary for the safety of the state, before any persons should be admitted into its functions, as Roman Catholics, who do not acknowledge the king, to be the head of the church. In England, the Catholics are not, he allowed, deprived of this right by name, but by implication, by prescribing as necessary qualifications, the oaths of allegiance and supremacy, that no man

might have political power, who was not attached to the constitution, both in church and state, and who did not acknowledge his majesty to be supreme in spiritual as well as civil jurisdiction.

It had been asserted and relied on, that the Catholics had exercised the right of franchise, until the 1st. of Geo. II. This was not the fact, for by every research he could make, they never exercised it since the revolution, and he would prove it from the journals which gave the best evidence of the practice and the usage of parliament.

He read the resolution of the house in 1697 declaring nem. con. that Papists ought to be excluded from the right of voting; he then stated, that in 1709 their right came in question, on the petition of Mr. Cusse for Irishtown, the proceedings on which were reported specially; and the case was, that 36 Papists, had offered for Mr. Cusse, and if they were admitted, he was duly elected.

The portrieve alledged, that he refused them having been informed, that *they had been before*

fore refused at Ross, and had not voted for many years. One evidence produced by the petitioner believes, *Papists voted formerly, but not of late time.* Another says, *Papists have been excluded from voting, since James's time, and the sitting member's council, insist that the Papists had not a right to vote, and had not voted since the Revolution.* No evidence whatsoever is produced to shew that they had ever voted which it must be supposed, would have been done, if the fact were so. A debate ensued in the committee whether Papists had votes or not, and they resolved the sitting member was duly elected, thereby declaring Papists had no votes. Those records clearly shew the usage from the revolution, and there is not any other entry on the journals which respects the subject, or which shews they ever had been allowed to vote.

The preamble of the 2d. of Anne, shews clearly the intent of the legislature, was to exclude them, “ and for preventing Papists having it in their power to breed dissensions, among Protestants, by voting at elections, of members of parliament, &c.” Even the act of Geo. II. which they say was the first that

excluded them, says in its preamble “ and for “ the *better* preventing Papists from voting “ &c.” as if it were a known fact, that they were before excluded, but some further regulation was necessary to enforce it. All these authorities justified his assertion, that they did not exercise the franchise, since the revolution and prove the point as fully as any negative can be proved, particularly when it is considered, that a resolution of the House of Commons, in those days, directed all matters of election.

He recurred back to two instances he had omitted, Copyholders and Lessees for years ; the former constitute a great body of the landholders of England, and the tenure is in fact perpetual ; but by very little better than a fiction, they are excluded upon the idea, that nominally they hold at will. Lessees for years, are a numerous class, and there seems a great stretch, of speculative reasoning, to say that a man possessed of land, for 999 years, is not as independent a voter, as he whose interest depends on a decayed life ; almost all the bishops land, and much corporation lands can produce no voters on the same principle, being all demised for years. Some gentlemen had said that copyholders and
tenants

tenants for years, may acquire freeholds in other places, but the papist, cannot exercise the franchise without changing his religious tenets. If this argument has weight, it is still stronger in favor of women, the papist incapacitates himself by adopting the tenets which disable him, but women, while the restraint continues, are incapacitated by the act of God, the one may by conformity acquire the right, the other's incapacity is physically irremovable, the argument therefore of those gentlemen, undoes itself by asserting too much.

Having thus cleared the question of right, out of the way, and shewn that the Catholics, could not demand this franchise, as a right, the committee was at liberty to discuss whether it be politic or not, to grant it to them as a *favor*.

In every thing which had hitherto been granted to them, he had concurred. He would allow them property, with equal security for that property, civil liberty, with equal security for that civil liberty, and every thing which could tend to their ease, their happiness and personal welfare, but he would draw a line round the constitution, within which he would
not

not admit them, while their principles were he would not say hostile, but certainly not as friendly to the constitution, as those of Protestants. It was impossible while church and state, were so intimately connected, that Roman Catholics avowedly averse to the one, could be as friendly to the other, or attached to a constitution founded on both, and one principle whereof was the inseparable union of both. He would say that the plain, natural and inevitable consequence of admitting them, within the pale of the constitution would be the destruction of the church establishment, and he would demonstrate this conclusion, step, by step, in a train of argument which appeared to him unanswerable.

It is vain to imagine, that admission to the elective franchise, does not draw with it the right of representation, it will follow whether you chuse it or not, for upon what ground can you say men are fit to be electors, and unfit to be elected. It had been urged indeed, that a different qualification was necessary, and that it was so in England, and probably would be soon so here, but admitting it even to be so, it made no difference in the argument, for the qualifications of both were of the same nature, differing only in the amount of the value, and not in any consideration

consideration arising from their opinions political attachment, or personal endowment.

If then by admitting them to be electors, you must allow them the right of being elected, and so give them seats in this house, upon what principle can you give them a seat in the one house, and refuse it to them in the other? Upon no one principle of common sense. And thus you give them possession of a full participation in the legislature. The next step to the offices of civil and military power inevitably follows. You cannot say, that men whom you allow to be qualified for legislation, are unfit to be trusted with the execution of those laws they join in forming. No; such a refusal would be absurd, in speculation, and unjustifiable in practice. Admitted then to every trust and power in the state, legislative and executive, do you think they would not feel their clergy degraded, while they remained subordinate? Would they rest content, when there was no inequality between the Protestant and Catholic Laity, that there should be a degrading and mortifying inequality, between the Protestant and Catholic Clergy?—He was not arguing on wild metaphysical speculations; he argued from human nature, from the common

mon workings of the feelings and passions of men, from what Protestants would do and had done, and what he himself would do were he a Catholic, in the same situation.—Catholics would never bear to see the clergy, of the minority, which the Protestants would then be, exalted by dignities, and supported in affluence and splendor, while theirs had neither honors, nor maintenance; they could not be content to see the clergy, who administered to them the duties of their religion, sunk in poverty, while the clergy of a church, to whom they had long been obliged to contribute, without profiting by their labors, were enjoying all the benefits of a wealthy establishment; subordination to Protestant power, had alone hitherto induced men to pay tithe, for support of a clergy, whose spiritual assistance they rejected. Possessed of power they would deem it but justice, to give tithe of Catholic to Catholic; and we should be at their mercy, whether they would allow the Protestant Minister, to receive even the tithe of his Protestant Parishioners; they would naturally say we have long paid tithe to men who never could make us any return of service; we have maintained a clergy whose doctrines, we cannot listen to, it is time for us

to

to pay our own clergy, and they might go further, we will put our clergy in their places, they shall henceforward enjoy what they have long labored for without reward, and we will establish our Church, on the ruins of the Protestant. Such would naturally be their language, and such the fate of the Protestant Clergy, and the end of the Protestant Church in Ireland; when the church is gone the state will soon follow; you cannot expect a Protestant state to subsist without a Protestant Church. In possession of power, they must wish to make theirs the religion of the state, and what would stand in their way? nothing but the King's Coronation oath "to maintain the laws of God, the true
 " profession of the Gospel, and the reformed
 " religion, established by the law, to preserve
 " unto the Bishops, and Clergy, of this realm,
 " and to the Churches committed to their
 " charge, all such rights and privileges as by
 " law, do or shall appertain to them."

While a Monarch sits on the Throne, who has taken this oath, their Church can never gain the Ascendancy; their object of course would be to have a Sovereign who should not be bound by it. I am persuaded their loyalty

and gratitude to his present Majesty, even were he to live half a century longer, would prevent their making any such attempt during his reign; but surely it is natural to suppose, they would take the first opportunity they could after, to obtain a Monarch not barred by such an oath from accomplishing their wishes. That Monarch could not be the British Sovereign. Britain would not alter the Coronation oath at their desire, and thus their interest, their wishes, and their ambition, must lead them to look for another Monarch; and thus would be effected a complete and total separation from Great Britain. These consequences flow so naturally from admitting this first inlet into the Constitution, that he could not divest his mind of them.—It was painful to him to feel their weight, and extremely unpleasant to him to mention them, he wished to avoid it, but a question of such moment, could not be argued without looking to all its consequences; he had never weighed any subject so much, he looked on it in every view, he wished to convince himself he was mistaken; he still wished it, and would from the bottom of his heart, thank any man, who would satisfy him he was in error, and remove his apprehensions; he

had

had no dislike to the Catholics, he wished to see no danger in a measure so likely to be adopted, but the train of reasoning which he had laid before the House, exactly as it had offered itself to his mind, had worked so strong upon him, that his opinion remained unshaken. —He was still more confirmed in it, by considering the circumstances of their clergy—their oath of ordination bound them not as our Monarch was bound merely to maintain, but to *extend and promote* (pro posse, he believed was the phrase) the interests of their Church. And all history concurred in proving their zeal; they have sent missionaries to propagate their religion at great expense, trouble and hazard, to almost every part of the world—extension of its doctrines, and its powers, is the duty of its professors; their habits of life too urge them to it; they are bound to celibacy; strangers to all the comforts of domestic life, their passions find no resting place, their home had not the allurements of love and of content, to engage and occupy their mind. Human passions are ever alive; if love don't engage them, ambition will; the experience of ages, shews us the ambition of the Romish Clergy, and when

that ambition is fired by a religious zeal, and by the certain consequence of great temporal emolument and dignity, who can say to what extent it may not go—their oath, their interest and their ambition, all concur in rousing them to exert every power, and watch every opportunity of effecting this change; and however unpleasant to advert to circumstances, of which the authors seem to have repented, he cannot avoid, as it is so apposite to the argument, to notice how eagerly and how early their prelates shewed their ambition, by claiming their titles of Archbishops and Bishops in their signatures to their petition the other day to this House, contrary to the existing laws, titles which they would not have presumed to have asserted, but from the influence of that ambitious zeal, which over-bore their judgment.—They foresaw their own ascendancy so strongly in the very first dawn of Catholic Power that they actually believed themselves in the possession of it.

But let it even be supposed that the overthrow of the Protestant Establishment, the dethronement of the House of Hanover, and
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a total separation from Great Britain, were not to be the inevitable consequences of the measure in debate, need he say, that there was still another reason for refusing the Franchise as proposed by the bill, that they themselves were not in a situation to receive it.

The utmost efforts of the election laws had been hardly sufficient to prevent perjury and avoid tumult; both these species of mischief the admission of Catholics would produce. Nothing tended more to perjury than the want of knowledge of the nature of an oath; and their superiors had expressed their opinion as to the lower order of Catholics upon this point. In their petition to the Throne (which by the way, he observed, was as imprudent a production as ever appeared from sensible men, but which, as not material to his argument, he should for the present forbear farther considering) they had stated that *numbers of Catholics preferring perjury to famine, submitted to oaths which they utterly disbelieved*. What were these oaths which they utterly disbelieved? The oaths of *allegiance* and *supremacy*. Were these the men whose loyalty was so highly praised, and who were to be admitted into the Legislature?

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and yet this is their character drawn by those who know them best. Would men, who could in the hour of coolness and reflection, take the oaths of allegiance and supremacy which they *utterly disbelieved*, hesitate in the heat and hurry of an election, to prefer bribery to perjury, and take oaths which were trifling, compared to those which they had before taken and disbelieved,—oaths by which they might persuade themselves they were gaining advocates in Parliament for their Religion?—When their friends say, they think so lightly of an oath, as to prefer perjury to famine, can you doubt they would take false oaths, where the advancement of their Religion was super-added to the avoidance of famine. He said, he spoke not of them from his own surmise or opinion, he stated the opinion which their own Body gave to the Throne, and published to the world. Here he could not help observing what ideas the petitioners themselves entertained of the Constitution of Parliament: In the last session, this House had rejected the petition of the Catholics for a qualified suffrage by an almost unanimous resolution; and how do these Gentlemen act now? They don't come again to Parliament, and pray it to
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take their case into consideration. No; they pray his Majesty to use his influence with his Parliament; they apply to the British Minister against the sense of this House, against the opinion expressed by every county almost in the kingdom, and do not scruple at endeavoring to procure an external influence upon this House. Are men with such unconstitutional ideas, fit to vote or sit, or legislate for this country? They set forth in the said petition that the Elective Franchise gives infinite variety of *advantages in protection and otherwise*, thus, intimating unwarily, that they consider it as proper to be applied to other uses, than the pure and uncorrupt choice of the fittest candidate; for what else do protection or advantage mean? Great stress has been laid on three millions, being excluded from Franchise, and the Petitioners desire that it may be recommended to Parliament, to consider their *numbers*. This is rather a blameable expression; it is too like a threat; but they forgot to state, that of these three millions, one half are excluded as females; that of these three millions, 2,100,000 are so poor that they cannot contribute 4d. a year each to the exigencies of the State without
oppression,

oppression, if we are to believe the return before the House, and to argue from the reduction which his Majesty's officers recommend to him in the duties of Hearth Money, on the principle, that there are so many subjects in this kingdom on whom it would be a grievance to continue a tax amounting to 4d. each: They forgot or rather omitted to tell his Majesty, when they represented their loyalty, that they were not, nor could they be loyal to the same extent with his Protestants, who acknowledged his supremacy in the whole, and they acknowledged it only in half, in his civil, but denied it in his ecclesiastical jurisdiction. They should have said at the same time, we claim your Majesty's favor to put us on an equality with the Protestants, but we do not, nor will we ever acknowledge you to have ecclesiastical or spiritual jurisdiction over us as they do—and here he remarked on the strange situation the Protestants would be left in, if this Bill passed. They were still to take the oath of supremacy, the Catholic was not; they whose principles were to acknowledge the King as supreme head, were to take a Test, while those whose principles were the contrary, were to take none; the loyal Protestant is to
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take one oath more than the Catholic ; it might operate as a temptation to conform to Popery ; for if among the number of subjects any should be found who might scruple to acknowledge any head of the Church, they would be absolved from it, by professing themselves Catholics. It is also worthy of remark here, that revenue officers were deprived of the Franchise in England, because they were supposed liable to the influence of their own British Monarch ; but Catholics are to be admitted to it here, who avow themselves in all ecclesiastical concerns to be under the direct influence of a foreign potentate, hostile to our Church and to our Religion.

Having thus argued on the unfitness of the inferior Catholics to exercise the elective Franchise at present, without injuring the purity of election ; he stated another danger to the Constitution from this admission, that they must be advocates for the worst species of reform, that of individual voting, which every gentleman on every side of the House reprobated. The Protestant was superior in property, inferior in number ; the Catholic the reverse ; and the latter must be blind indeed to his own interest, if he did not endeavour to procure that reform

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which would give the influence to numbers and take it from property. But there is one consideration not yet adverted to,—you are trustees for your constituents, they are Protestants, have you the power to destroy their rights, by overwhelming them without their consent: For his part he received his seat in this House, and the trust which he brought with it, from Protestants, under a Protestant King, a Protestant Constitution and a Protestant Ascendancy, and by the blessing of God, he never would give up their rights till they should desire him. Consult your constituents before you venture on such an act;—will you give to the petitioners, for their 3 millions of men, a full participation of all that the one million enjoys, and not see that you are overpowering the rights of the one million?—Gentlemen talk of prohibiting forty-shilling Freeholders from voting; they will not attempt so wild a project, when they consider it—What! to disfranchise near two-thirds of all the Protestants, to disfranchise those persons who sent them into this House. The law in their favor had existed since Henry VI. and now forms a principle of the Constitution;—did the gentlemen who lived in the North recollect that
this

this would disfranchise all their manufacturers? one gentleman did, and supported their rights, he meant the member for Tyrone, *Mr. Stewart*, whom he always heard with pleasure, for his principles were sound, and he was a true friend to the Constitution. Did they wish to force manufacturers to look for ten pound freeholds, they would be spoiled as manufacturers and be miserable farmers? the weaver with his little piece of land and his garden is generally a forty-shilling Freeholder, he is a useful member, a good voter and a good subject, and on such men as him, may the safety of the Constitution often depend—he said he had only one consideration to add to the arguments already offered, and this was from the present times and circumstances. The advocates for the Bill relied on them much, and that it was necessary to give this Franchise to make the Catholic a steady friend to the kingdom against the common enemy, who threatened our coasts with all the savage barbarities of French cruelty; he had a much better opinion of them, he did believe them loyal to their King, and that they would not desert their country, or fail to support it, because the Parliament did not chuse in the

time of war and danger, suddenly to change laws which had subsisted for a century. If he could think of them in the bad light their friends represent them by that argument, he should say it was decisive against the Bill, they were unmeriting of favor, and totally unfit to be trusted with any power whatever--- Conciliation is dwelt on as a motive, but will the Bill conciliate? You gave them much last year for conciliation, did they thank you? No; they rose in their demands and passed you by; it is not in the nature of any body of men, who look to full participation of power, to rest satisfied with a partial share, they never will be contented while any thing remains to be obtained. But what is the conciliation you wish for? Not to his Majesty—for their loyalty there you say is past all doubt; if it be conciliation to their Irish Protestant brethren, do you think they will feel themselves obliged to them as the authors of this grant? will they receive it as a voluntary favour, moving from them? No; you know they did not originate it, you know it did not originate in this kingdom; there has been a race for the Catholic, and such of you as have entered the lists have been outrun,

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My Rt. Hon. Friend, (*Major Hobart*) says, our relaxation last year, justified Britain in interfering now, but our relaxation then went only to put the Catholic on equality with respect to property, protection and civil rights—this bill goes to a very different point, to give him political power; but does our rejection of the Catholic petition last year, do the resolves of all the counties in the kingdom, justify the interference? Gentlemen have thanked the Irish minister for this measure; he could not thank him for it, tho' he could for many others; for from his soul he considered it as the prelude and certain forerunner of the overthrow of the Protestant establishment in Ireland. The British minister was the first to rouse this question, and he was not well advised; the country was in peace, thriving in manufactures, industry and trade, public credit high, and revenues ample; what is the case now, old animosities are revived, money which was got then at $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent, for the public, cannot now be procured under 5, if we may judge from the money bill;—trade is hurt, the revenues fallen, and industry destroyed by tumult in many parts of Ireland; this change has not arisen from French transactions; they have not been felt here, at least not till very lately; it arises from the fears and agitations into which

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this kingdom, has been thrown by the rousing and supporting this claim—But to return—if to conciliate be your object, this measure will not answer; three millions of Catholics are spoke of, to be conciliated, but you forget the one million of Protestants, will you leave them contented by surrendering their rights and their establishment? will the manner in which the measure is begun and pressed forward conciliate them?—no.—We are in that awkward and unhappy situation, that we cannot obtain conciliation, either by the passing or rejecting the bill; pass it, you do not fulfil the Catholic wish, and you alarm the Protestant,—reject it, and the Catholic will complain of you.

Having gone through these arguments, he shortly recapitulated them: I have shewn you that you are not bound to give franchise as a right, that you cannot grant it as a favor, without hazarding the overthrow of the Protestant church, the Hanover succession, and our connexion with Great Britain; that even if you could do it without such hazard, the mass of the Catholic body, is unfit to exercise it, with safety or advantage; that such a grant will make every Catholic, an advocate for the worst species of reform, where numbers and not property,

perty, are to influence; that if these arguments have no weight, still you are but trustees for your constituents, and cannot surrender their right without their especial leave, which you have not obtained. That if you had their leave, the times, the circumstance of intimidation, of resort to a British ministry and impracticability of conciliation, would all render the measure unwise in the extreme. And here he called on those who represent northern counties; you have heard the Protestant mind is changed there, but you cannot know it for the fact is not so, the Grand Juries and respectable meetings have declared against the measure, some few small bodies assembled without authority give a contrary opinion. Do you believe even those few wish this grant from conviction of its policy? very far otherwise, they want to gain the Catholic for the reform, to which they would now sacrifice every thing, and if you pass this bill, they will repent their folly, and say, you had neither the wisdom nor firmness that representatives ought to possess. He next called on those who had signed or sanctioned by their presence at grand juries or county meetings a disapprobation of this measure. What has happened since to change
 your

your mind? not the imprudence and asperity of the Catholic proceedings ; not the interference of the British ministry, in direct opposition to your own sentiments ; not the threats of numbers, for you are above intimidation, but you are told the Protestant mind has changed. I allow prospect of war, and fear of troubles at home may have operated upon a few, and particularly in Dublin, where want of discount and fall of stocks, alarm some timid traders ; but I cannot believe it is changed in the country, because as far as I know, or have heard, it is quite the reverse ; if the news-papers be your authority, I answer, they propagate many falsehoods to carry this measure, and notoriously misrepresent the real sentiments and situation. If there be any in the House, who even entertain a doubt of the policy or safety of the measure, he said, that in wisdom, they must now vote against it, it was of a nature that it never could be revoked, but they might at any time embrace it with equal effect when those doubts should cease. He urged them all to postpone the Bill till after the assizes, to consult their constituents in the mean time and then they could proceed on secure grounds. He
entreated

entreated the House earnestly to consider that no country was ever lost by firmness, many have been ruined by pusillanimity. Stand by the Constitution, support it, and it will support you, you are strong enough to maintain it; shew that neither the British Minister, nor any British power, shall ever make you change it. *A Constitution*, to conclude in the words of as wise and firm a Patriot as ever lived——

“ So dearly bought, the price of so much blood!

“ Oh! never let it perish in your hands,

“ But piously transmit it to your children.”

IN reply to Major Hobart——

He did not say the discussion of this measure was what injured the kingdom, it was the first stirring of it; and he differed from him from the first moment it was mentioned, because he saw it would destroy the Protestant Establishment.

The discussion of it, after it was once stirred, became necessary, and so much was he of that

that opinion, that the Rt. Hon. Gentleman must do him the justice to recollect, that when the subject of the Popery Laws was stirred last session, he recommended a full and ample discussion then, of every article of them; and finally to tell the Catholics, what we could relax, and what we could not relax; as the most manly and satisfactory mode of proceeding.

He never blamed the Irish Government, nor did he blame them now; they could not act otherwise; the measure began in Britain, but he should never cease to think it was extreme folly, or indiscretion in the British Ministry, to rouse the question here. He would add, that much as he feared its fatal consequences, and much as he opposed it, yet, should it pass into a law, it would then be his duty, from that moment, to give up his own opinions, to embrace it as the law of the land, and do every thing that an individual could do to render it beneficial, and effectual.

FINIS

